

White House press briefing [via *Washington Post* Live]

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2:53:11 p.m.

3 minutes and 42 seconds

AAMER MADHANI: TikTok isn't safe for government workers' devices. Does the President believe it's safe for Americans' children's smartphones?

KARINE JEAN-PIERRE: So, I'm glad that you asked about that because, look, we have been clear about our concerns about TikTok, apps like TikTok and certainly our concerns with countries, including China, have — as they seek to leverage digital technologies and Americans' data in ways that can present harm and — and risk to our national security, clearly. There was, to your point about families — there was a piece of data, a CDC data that just found recently that nearly 60 percent of teen girls felt persistently, sad, or hopeless in 2021 and — and 30 percent seriously considered suicide, so this is something that the President has taken action on. If you look at the executive — executive of — using his executive branch authorities, when you think about his unity agenda, a couple of things that he was able to do was stop collecting — stop collecting personal data on kids and teenagers online, ban targeted advertising to children. And impose stricter limits on the personal data companies collect on all of us. And so, this is what the President calls on for Congress to pass in a bipartisan way — you know, privacy legislation to — to hold by — by — Big Tech accountable. And so, the President's going to continue to take actions, but we see that. We see that in the data, how this is affected young people, especially during this pandemic in the last couple of years.

WEIJIA JIANG: Thanks, Karine. To follow on that, does the President believe that TikTok is a threat to national security?

JEAN-PIERRE: Well, we have concerns. We have concerns about the app and that's why we have called on Congress to act and — including and I mentioned earlier, just moments ago, including what China, how China is trying to collect the privacy of Americans in a way that it would have — it — can present national security risks, so yes, we have concerns about that and, and look, we're going to continue to, again, to call on Congress. I just laid out the President's unity agenda and what he's looking to do and the actions that he wants to take from the executive branch of his authority. And so we're going to continue to call that out.

JIANG: Does that — do the actions include a ban on all devices in the U.S.?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, look, what I — would I would say is this: the White House does not use TikTok and — but we do believe — we do believe that — that — you know, Congress took action and so, therefore — clearly, we're — we're — they took action and put this into law and clearly, we're taking — taking those steps as it — as it relates to the federal government. Outside of that, we know that CFIUS has an ongoing investigation or — ongoing — looking at this — looking at this situation, so I'm not going to go beyond what CFIUS is doing.

JIANG: And I guess what I'm trying to understand is, you know, has the President not issued a

federal ban on TikTok on all devices because he does not think it's a threat to national security or because he does not have a legal mechanism to do so?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, I'm not going to get into the specifics on what he has legally to do so or to not do so. What I'm saying — and we've been very clear that TikTok, you know, poses a problem and an issue and so, we have concerns about that as it relates to Americans data, collecting Americans' data and the potential national security risk. And we've been very, very clear on that. Again, CIFUS has an ongoing process that they're going — they're working through, so I'm going to let that — that speak for itself what they come up with.

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EDWARD LAWRENCE: You talked about TikTok earlier. I'm just curious now why did the administration then wait so long to ban TikTok in all federal employees — 29 states have already done it and the President, in his first month in office, cancelled an investigation by the Commerce Department into TikTok, so why did he wait so long?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, I'm not going to speak to any investigation. Look, the process is happening now. That's what we're seeing. What I can say is that the President has very been very clear about his concern with apps like TikTok and I just laid out the CDC reporting and how it's affecting our children. And the importance of making sure that we deal with this in a real way, which is why he put forth his unity agenda and laying out ways that we can deal with an issue that is affecting the emotional growth and — and also of our children. And so look, at the unity agenda kind of lays out how the President wants to move forward. I'm not going to go beyond that.

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5 minutes and 11 seconds

PETER DOOCY: Why is President Biden afraid of China?

JEAN-PIERRE: The President is not afraid of China.

DOOCY: Well —

JEAN-PIERRE: Did you — did you see the President last week when we went to — when we went to — when we went to Ukraine, went to Kyiv? Look, this is not a President who's afraid of anything. It was a historic trip that many of you said was brave, so clearly, this is a president that's not afraid to go to a war zone. He's not afraid to go there when there's no military presence on the ground, so there's nothing that this President fears.

DOOCY: China flew a spy craft over the U.S. The President didn't really do anything to China and, according to the FBI director, China may have created something that has killed more 1.1 million people in this country and President Biden is not punishing them?

JEAN-PIERRE: So you're — you're giving me two — two things here, so let's take them in parts. As we talk about the Chinese surveillance — the China surveillance balloon, the President did take that down and he that down in a way that, as it was on its path, collected information from it, we protected on national security information on the ground and we did it in a way that was smart, effective, and also protected the American people. That's what the President is always going to put forth is the — is the safety of the American people. So, that's what the president did with that particular issue. Look as it relates to, you're talking about the COVID origins. We've been very clear. We've been very clear that we need the data. And we need to figure out how to get to the bottom of — of the COVID origins and that's something that the President has said since the beginning of this administration, so that none of that has changed.

DOOCY: But — but with his campaign, it was all about shutting down the virus and how hard it is for families with an empty chair at the kitchen table because of COVID. If we now know, according to the FBI director, who was most likely responsible for all those empty chairs at all those kitchen tables, why not do more to try to hold them accountable?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, so I'm going to flip that on its head for a second. It was because of this President that took action — by the way, the last administration did not — they did not — have a comprehensive plan to actually —

DOOCY: But [inaudible] —

JEAN-PIERRE: — no, no, no, no.

DOOCY: — that is —

JEAN-PIERRE: No.

DOOCY: — responding to COVID.

JEAN-PIERRE: No, no.

DOOCY: But where did COVID come from if we know —

JEAN-PIERRE: Peter, you can't tell me — first of all, you can't tell me how to answer the question. I'm going to answer it for you, right? So, just give me a second. So, because he took those actions, he actually helped to save lives because he — he took action to make sure that people got shots in arms and put a comprehensive plan in front of the American people. And put in the work, we actually were able to get to a place where COVID has not gone. But we now are in the place — we're in a different place in the pandemic and that's because of the President. And that's because of his leadership. So, let's not let's like be very real about that — what the

President has done over the last two years, to take on COVID, to make sure that the economy is growing again, to make sure that we're really working for the American people. So that's number one. I want to be very, very clear on that. Now to your question about COVID origins. As we've known — as we know, we have seen many — many different conclusions — right — from — from — from the intelligence community. Some of them have made some conclusion on one side, some of them have made conclusions on the other side. Some of them say they don't have enough information, so want to be also very careful there as well. And it was because of this President — very early on, the first several months of his administration, he went to the intelligence community and said we need to figure out how to get to the bottom of this. We need to figure out how this all occurred because who knows? We have to try and prevent any future pandemic, so that is the work that this President does. And it included, clearly, the department of energy to has national labs and so now they're continuing to double down and try to get to the bottom of this. Our relationship with China has not changed. It is — it is very different, very clear, very different than how we've seen it in the last administration. All right, I'm going to continue. [TO ALEXANDER] Go ahead, Peter and I'll come to —

PETER ALEXANDER: Just a separate thought on China, if I can, quickly. The administration's constantly described the relationship between the U.S. and China as one of the strategic competition. The point that the President made himself a couple of weeks ago when he spoke about this issue. The Congressman, Mike Gallagher, who is the Republican chair of the House Select Committee on China yesterday referred to this relationship as an existential struggle. Does the White House agree with that characterization? And is the White House understating the threat from China right now?

JEAN-PIERRE: So under this President, we are more prepared to out-compete China, protect our security, and advance a free and open Indo-Pacific than ever before. That's under this President. And that's because of the work that he's done a last two years and also the experience. This is an experience President, as you know. He spent more than 30 years in the Senate. He spent eight years as Vice President. And so, he understands national — how to deal with foreign policy relationships, foreign leaders. And so, that's how we see our relationship with China moving forward. Many of our efforts we have been pursuing are bipartisan. They're underscoring the alignment at home on the key issues and we will continue to work with Democrats and Republicans because the way we have moved forward is indeed in a bipartisan way.

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LAUREN EGAN: Just another question on TikTok. You all have had TikTok influencers in the building before. You've briefed them before. Given the focus on the national security concerns, do you still feel like that's an appropriate way to engage with the app?

JEAN-PIERRE: So look — as I mentioned before, the White House clearly does not — does not does TikTok. But one thing that we do believe in is meeting the American people where they are

and the reality is, some — many of them — millions of them are — are — are on this app, so we engage with people who are using their own platforms. It's up to them on how they use the content, but we've always said, from here, this is something that we have said for a long time that we're going to try to communicate with the American people and meet them where they are. But we are also have been clear about the concerns that we have with this — with — with apps like TikTok and that's not going to stop.